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# **Painfulness, Desire, and the Euthyphro Dilemma**

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## **Abstract**

The traditional desire view of painfulness maintains that pain sensations are painful because the subject desires that they not be occurring. A significant criticism of this view is that it apparently succumbs to a version of the Euthyphro Dilemma: the desire view, it is argued, is committed to an implausible answer to the question of *why* pain sensations are painful. In this paper I explain and defend a new desire view, and one which can avoid the Euthyphro Dilemma. This new view maintains that painfulness is a property, not of pain sensations, but of a pain experience, understood as a relational state constituted by a pain sensation and a desire that the sensation not be occurring.

## Painfulness, Desire, and the Euthyphro Dilemma

What makes pains painful? The *desire view* of painfulness maintains that painfulness is an extrinsic quality of pain sensations. In particular, the view holds that pain sensations count as painful because the subject is averse to them or desires that they cease. Now there is much to be said in favour of the desire view. First, by appealing to desire we can capture the heterogeneity of painful experiences; to this extent the desire view seems preferable to internalist accounts, such as phenomenological or felt-quality views, which, notoriously, struggle on this score.<sup>1</sup> Second, by appealing to desire we capture the platitude that painfulness has intrinsic motivational force, desire being an intrinsically motivating state; to this extent the desire view seems preferable to rival externalist accounts, such as evaluativism and imperativism, which, arguably, struggle to explain why painfulness and motivation are thus connected.<sup>2</sup>

The desire view, however, itself faces a number of serious objections, and perhaps the most challenging of these is a version of the *Euthyphro Dilemma*. According to this objection, the desire view is committed to an implausible answer to the question of *why* pain sensations are painful. At the heart of this criticism is the claim that desires lack the normative force to enable the view to capture what is supposed to be a platitude about painfulness: that the painfulness of some sensation gives one a good or justificatory reason to act so that the painfulness ceases.

In this paper I want to argue that the desire view, as traditionally understood, is indeed undermined by this criticism. However, I also want to

argue that a view in the vicinity – that is, a view which holds that painfulness necessarily depends upon desire – can both avoid the Euthyphro Dilemma, and (not unrelatedly) capture the platitude that painfulness necessarily gives one good or justificatory reason to act. To anticipate, the view I want to defend maintains that painfulness is not a property of pain sensations themselves, but is instead a property of a pain *experience*, where this is understood as a *relational state* consisting of a pain sensation plus a desire. If I am right, then those who think that painfulness is necessarily grounded in desire will have good reason to adopt my view, rather than the desire view as traditionally understood. Or so, at least, I want to suggest.<sup>3</sup>

In § 1 I outline how the desire view is traditionally understood, and explain how it is susceptible to a version of the Euthyphro Dilemma. In § 2 I consider a response to the problem on behalf of the desire theorist, and argue that it is unsuccessful. In § 3 I diagnose the problem for the traditional desire view, and suggest a different way of viewing the necessary connection between pain sensations, desires, and painfulness. In § 4 I explain how this new desire view of painfulness manages to avoid the Euthyphro Dilemma and captures the normativity that painfulness is supposed to have. And in § 5 I argue that the new desire view is not susceptible to a *new* version of the Euthyphro Dilemma, but will give the *same answer* to these Euthyphro-type questions as its opponents.

## 1.

According to the desire view, painfulness can be explained by appeal to two elements. The first is a *pain sensation*. On many popular accounts, this is

regarded as a “somatosensory perceptual experience,”<sup>4</sup> and so painfulness necessarily involves “a form of bodily perception.”<sup>5</sup> Some versions of perceptualist accounts are *representationalist*. O’Sullivan & Schroer write that on this view, “my pain experience discriminates (i.e., makes me aware of) a throbbing bodily state in my ankle by *representing* my ankle as having a pulsing disorder; my pain experience discriminates a state of minor damage in my back by *representing* my back as undergoing mild and brief damage, etc.”<sup>6</sup> Other accounts deny that such sensations have representational content, typically on the grounds that it is not obvious that pain sensations represent what the representationalists propose.<sup>7</sup> But whether representationalist or not, the desire theorist denies that sensations are *sufficient* for painfulness, since it seems possible for a subject to experience a pain sensation and yet *fail* to suffer or fail to experience anything painful.<sup>8</sup> Those who take the phenomenon of pain asymbolia seriously think this is indeed possible, in which case a representation of bodily disturbance will not suffice as an explanation of painfulness. Some other element is needed, one that on this view makes the pain sensation *painful*.

The desire view holds that pain sensations are painful when the subject desires that the sensation cease – or more correctly, desires that the sensation not be occurring. Defenders of this kind of view in the pain literature include William Alston, David Armstrong, Richard Brandt, Richard Hall, Christopher Heathwood, Christine Korsgaard, Derek Parfit, George Pitcher, and (the early) Michael Tye.<sup>9</sup> On Christopher Heathwood’s version – which is perhaps the most developed example of the desire view in the current literature – “[a] sensation S, occurring at time t, is unpleasant at t *iff* the subject of S desires, intrinsically and *de re*, at t, of S, that it not be occurring at t.”<sup>10</sup> Heathwood is here talking about

unpleasantness in general, but we can adapt the account to be about pain in particular by restricting S to one of the class of pain sensations.<sup>11</sup> In what follows, I'll take Heathwood's account to be the desire view *as traditionally understood*; this is not a misnomer, if we think that his account does the best job of presenting an account that many other philosophers have held over the years.

As stated, the desire view faces a very serious objection – namely, that it succumbs to a version of the Euthyphro Dilemma. In particular, the desire view is thought to be problematic, because it implies an implausible answer to Euthyphro-type questions. Consider a pain sensation experienced by a normal, non-symbolic subject called Paige, which is thus experienced by Paige as *painful*. And suppose we ask, of this sensation, whether (i) it is painful because Paige desires that the sensation cease, or whether (ii) Paige desires that the sensation cease because it is painful.<sup>12</sup> The case against the desire view rests upon the fact that (ii) seems by some distance the most natural and plausible explanation. If so, however, then we have good grounds to reject the desire view, since a better explanation of painfulness is at hand.

An initial response, on behalf of the desire theorist, would be to ask her opponent to justify the claim that (ii) is indeed the more plausible explanation. Why, the desire theorist might ask, should we think that our intuitions in this instance are correct? But here the critic of the desire view can offer more in the way of support. One obvious point to raise, which mirrors the structure of the original Euthyphro Dilemma, is that (i) seems suspect because the attitude in question seems *arbitrary* or *rationaly ungrounded*. (In the original version of the dilemma, recall, the claim that an action is pious because loved by the gods appears suspect, because the love of the gods is in this case ungrounded and

arbitrary.) If it is not the case that Paige desires that the sensation cease *because* the sensation is painful, then we seem to lack any explanation *at all* for Paige's desire in particular, and for desires directed at this kind of sensation in general. Unless we appeal to the painfulness of pain sensations, therefore, the fact that all normal humans do desire that pain sensations cease seems utterly mysterious and inexplicable. So *that's* why answer (ii) seems natural and plausible.

This argument against the desire view is unconvincing, however, since the claim that the relevant desire is mysterious and inexplicable unless we appeal to the painfulness of the relevant sensation is false. Indeed, there is an obvious explanation for why creatures like us desire that pain sensations cease, and one that makes no appeal to the painfulness of the sensations. Instead, this explanation relies upon the reliable connection between pain sensations and various kinds of *bodily damage or disturbance*. In other words, a *non*-arbitrary explanation of why we desire that pain sensations cease, and one that doesn't appeal to any alleged property of painfulness that the sensations possess, simply notes the adaptive advantage of having such desires. For given the reliable connection between these sensations and bodily damage, those who desire that the sensations cease will be motivated to deal with such damage, and increase their chances of survival. As Richard Hall puts the point, "animals that are genetically disposed to dislike [pain] sensations and which react accordingly (i.e., by behaving in ways that tend to stop or reduce these sensations) live longer, reproduce more, and are selected for."<sup>13</sup> To be sure, this explanation does not appeal to features of the pain sensation that constitute a subject's *motivating reasons*, since the connection between sensations of this kind and bodily damage might be beyond her ken, or in any case motivationally inert. But why should this

matter? Non-arbitrariness does not, I take it, require a person-level explanation of why someone desires as she does. As a result, appeal to this kind of evolutionary story suffices to undermine the charge of arbitrariness laid against the desire view's answer to Euthyphro-type questions.

Unfortunately for the desire theorist, this is only a temporary reprieve. For her opponent can argue that what really lies behind the Euthyphro Dilemma, at least when directed at accounts of painfulness, isn't a charge of arbitrariness, but the charge that the desire view cannot capture the *normativity* that painfulness is meant to have.<sup>14</sup> Let me explain. Suppose it is true that one has good reason to desire that some pain sensation cease, in cases where that sensation accurately indicates bodily damage. One has good reason in this instance because so desiring is a way of dealing appropriately with said damage. However, what of cases where the pain sensation does not indicate bodily damage – indeed, what of cases where we *know* that our pain system is going wrong and that there is no damage or disturbance that our pain is correlated with? In such cases it is *also* true that the one has good reason to act so that the painful pain ceases. In other words, painful pains *necessarily* give one good or justificatory *pro tanto* reason to act so that the sensation ceases; they give us good reason whether or not they are indicative of bodily damage. The worry for the desire view is that it is badly placed to capture this platitude about painfulness and normative reasons, namely the platitude that we necessarily have good reason to act so that painful pains cease. For desires don't – so the argument goes – *necessarily* give us good or justificatory *pro tanto* reasons to do things.<sup>15</sup> So this is what's really wrong with the desire theorist's claim that the painfulness of some sensation depends upon a desire that the sensation cease, and hence with answer (i) to Euthyphro-



type questions: such a desire will fail to necessarily provide a *pro tanto* justificatory reason to act, and so fail to adequately capture the normativity of painfulness.

To see this, note that many of our actual desires can be normatively suspect: perhaps some of the things we presently want are based upon false beliefs, or are such that they would be extinguished if we knew a little more about their objects, or are *ad hoc* and fit poorly with the rest of our desires and other attitudes.<sup>16</sup> It is doubtful that such desires give us good reason to do what they incline us to do. For instance, if my desire to run in the London Marathon is based upon the false belief that this is a good way to strengthen my knees, then I don't have a good or justificatory reason to enter the race. Or if my desire to enlist in the Foreign Legion would disappear if I knew more of what life as a legionnaire was like, then here too we might think that I lack good reason to enlist. On this view, the mere fact that one has some desire doesn't suffice to give one good reason to act. As a result, an explanation of painfulness that appeals to desire fails to capture one of the central features that painfulness is supposed to have. The desire-theorist's answer to Euthyphro-type questions is therefore inadequate, and the desire view of painfulness implausible.

In the next section I'll consider a possible response that the desire theorist can make, and argue that it is unsuccessful. In the sections to follow I'll propose the shape that a desire view ought to take if it is to avoid the Euthyphro Dilemma, and in so doing capture the normativity of painfulness.

## 2.

The claim against the desire view as traditionally understood is that mere desires seem to lack the status or authority to guarantee the necessary relationship between painfulness and good or justificatory reasons to act. Faced with this kind of objection, a defender of the view that painfulness necessarily depends upon desires might argue that the relevant desires are *not*, as it turns out, normatively suspect, but in fact pass muster. If so, it will follow that the subject always has good reason to act on them.

To see this, note that a common defence strategy employed by subjectivists, who hold that justificatory reasons depend upon our desires, is to appeal, not to the desires we actually have, but to the desires that we *would* have in certain idealized or improved conditions. On plausible versions of subjectivism, what we have good reason to do is grounded in a *subset* of our actual desires: what is rational for me is not necessarily what I presently want, but what I would want (or want that my actual self want) were I to be in certain idealized or improved circumstances.<sup>17</sup> But accepting that our actual desires sometimes fail to live up to the relevant normative standards is compatible with thinking that painfulness nevertheless depends upon our desires: for our actual desires do not fail to live up to the relevant standards *when it comes to pain sensations*. Instead, our desiring that a pain sensation cease is a desire that we would have under idealized conditions, or a desire that our fully rational selves would have about our actual pain sensations. As a result, what seem like ‘mere desires’ succeed in capturing the normativity of painfulness because such desires are, as it turns out, normatively adequate.

Consider, in support, the following from David Sobel. He writes:

“subjectivists should claim that intrinsic favouring and disfavouring attitudes ground reasons when they are accurately informed about what their object is like. Such desires are more fully for their object as it really is than for the object as it is falsely believed to be ... Desires for current phenomenology are uniquely accurately and fully informed about their object. Indeed, it might now seem a mark in the subjectivist’s favour that we think that the cases in which we have the most confidence that our desires carry normative authority are cases in which we are most confident we have excellent access to accurate information about what certain options are like. Matters of mere taste (where desires are commonly allowed to carry authority) tend to be cases where we have uncommon access to the relevantly informed vantage point.”<sup>18</sup>

Sobel’s point is that desires concerning current phenomenology, and hence desires concerning current pain sensations, do indeed possess normative authority, because we are *already* in an ideal or informed epistemic position with respect to these objects. Unlike desires to enter the London Marathon or to enlist in the Foreign Legion, where we might be unaware of what these things would be like were they to be attained and hence where our epistemic situation could be improved, or where the desires don’t fit with any other of our mental states and are thus *ad hoc*, desires concerning our current phenomenal states are not capable of epistemic improvement, and to this extent count as meeting the relevant normative standards. So a criticism about the lack of reason-giving power of mere desire doesn’t apply to accounts of painfulness in terms of current pain sensations that we want to cease.

This is an intriguing reply. But it fails to provide an adequate defence of the desire view as traditionally understood, since we can doubt that we are always in an ideal epistemic situation with respect to our current phenomenal states. Consider, to illustrate, an example which focuses on a broader experience of unpleasantness, but which can be modified to make a similar point with respect to painfulness. The example focuses on the taste sensation of a filet mignon steak. Experiencing the taste of a well cooked and high quality filet mignon steak is, for most carnivores, very pleasant. And let us suppose that our subject, Carol, is one of those people: Carol enjoys the taste of filet mignon very much. On the desire view of pleasantness, Carol's experience in such instances consists of a bodily-gustatory sensation that she strongly wants to continue. Suppose now that Carol is dining on what is in fact high quality filet mignon in a fancy restaurant, but is informed that it is horse meat she is tasting. *This* state is one that is, I assume, unpleasant for many carnivores. And suppose that Carol is one such: Carol finds the taste of what she thinks to be horse meat very unpleasant. Carol would, in this case, strongly desire that the taste sensation cease. However, this is *not* a sensation that she would strongly desire to cease if she were better informed: if, that is, she were informed that she is actually eating filet mignon and not horse meat. As a result, Carol undergoes an unpleasant gustatory experience, even though, were she better informed, she would not want the taste sensation to cease. It is therefore false that in matters of taste we are uniquely accurately and fully informed about the objects of our desires and aversions. As a result, it cannot be the case that unpleasantness is a matter of what a subject would desire, were she fully informed. Something similar can be said about painfulness. Painfulness is, after all, simply a form or kind of

unpleasant experience, and so the same argument will apply with respect to this negative affective state as well.

At this point someone might claim that even if the argument goes through with respect to unpleasantness, it does *not* apply with respect to pain. For we *do* stand in a privileged epistemic relation to pain, such that mistakes about pain are not possible. It is, after all, a staple of common sense and traditional thinking that if we think that we are in pain then we are, and if we are in pain then we think that we are.<sup>19</sup> But it seems to me that this confidence in our infallibility when it comes to pain is misplaced. In support, think of the difficulty we sometimes have in determining whether some sensation – say, of an ice cube on one’s skin – is painful, or merely very cold. It is often not clear to us when we are in pain in such cases, which raises the possibility of our being in pain and yet not realising this. By the same token, there can be cases where someone thinks that they are in pain – say, a young child who overreacts to a minor injury – and yet are who is not in pain, as indicated when the child immediately stops crying upon being told “stop making a fuss, that doesn’t hurt.” If so, we are not uniquely and fully informed about the objects of our desires in cases of pain sensations, any more than we are in cases of unpleasant sensations in general.

### 3.

In this section I want to diagnose why the traditional desire view fails, and propose, in the light of this diagnosis, a more plausible way of understanding the necessary relationship between painfulness, pain sensations, and desire.

In my view, the mistake made by the traditional desire theorist is akin to that made by those who favour a narrow-scope reading of another necessary relationship, namely the instrumental principle that governs our means-end reasoning.<sup>20</sup> To see this, note that nearly everyone agrees that in *some* sense one has good reason to take the means that are necessary to achieve one's ends. But there are two ways in which to understand this principle or requirement. On the narrow-scope reading, if I have some end, then I ought to take the necessary means to that end. The reason or ought in this case attaches to the means that are needed to secure the end in question. On the wide-scope reading, however, what I have good reason to do is *either* take the means to my end, or relinquish the end. Formally, with E as end, M as means, and R as justificatory reason, the narrow-scope reading holds that  $E \rightarrow RM$ , whilst the wide-scope reading holds that  $R(E \rightarrow M)$ . Now one very good reason to reject the narrow-scope reading of the instrumental principle is that it permits the generation of justificatory reasons to do what I clearly lack any good reason to do. Suppose that my end E is to become the shortest philosopher in my department. And suppose that the only way I can achieve this would be to undergo height-reduction surgery. On the narrow-scope reading, then, the fact that I have this end entails that I have good or justificatory reason to undergo height-reduction surgery. But I take it that I don't have any good or justificatory reason to do this. The mere fact that I have some end, and that something is a necessary means to achieving this end, does not imply that I therefore have good or justificatory reason to take the means to achieve my end. The relation between ends, means, and good reasons cannot be as the narrow-scope reading of the instrumental principle supposes.

It seems to me that the traditional desire view is guilty of the same kind of error. This view can be regarded as starting from the (admittedly less widely accepted) thought that painfulness necessarily depends in some way upon the relation between desires and pain sensations, and then proposing a narrow-scope reading of this relation. On this way of understanding the relation, if I desire that some pain sensation cease, then this is enough to make that pain sensation painful: the painfulness attaches to the pain sensation that is the object of my aversion. Because of this, the narrow-scope reading implies, along with the platitude that painfulness necessarily provides good or justificatory reasons, that if I desire that some pain sensation cease, then I have a good or justificatory reason to act so that the sensation ceases. And this claim, as we have seen, is implausible, since mere desires like normative authority.

If the problem is that the desire view, as traditionally understood, employs a narrow-scope reading of the relation between painfulness, pain sensations, and desire, then the solution for those who wish to maintain that painfulness is necessarily grounded in desire might now seem obvious: adopt a wide-scope reading of this relationship. The *new* desire view of painfulness will hold that painfulness does not attach to the pain sensation itself, but instead is a property of the pain sensation *plus* a desire that this sensation cease. It is not a pain sensation that is painful, therefore, but the experience of *having a painful sensation that one wants to cease*.<sup>21</sup> Seen in this way, painfulness is an evaluative property of a *relation* – akin to, say, the property of the *strength* of a marriage – rather than a property of one of the relata. In the next section I'll explain how understanding the relation between painfulness, pain sensations, and desire in

this way can enable us avoid the Euthyphro Dilemma, and (not unrelatedly) capture the normativity that painfulness is thought to have.

4.

Recall that the problem for the desire view, as traditionally understood, is that it is susceptible to a version of the Euthyphro Dilemma. For suppose we ask, of some pain sensation experienced by a normal subject Paige, whether (i) it is painful because the Paige desires that it cease, or whether (ii) Paige desires that the sensation cease because it is painful. The desire view is committed to answering (i), whereas answer (ii) appears to be more natural and more plausible. However, from the standpoint of our new desire-based account of painfulness, according to which painfulness is a property, not of a pain sensation, but of the relation between the sensation and a desire that it cease, there is no longer a worry for the desire theorist, since she is not committed to answering (i) rather than (ii). For since on this new desire view it is the *experience* of having a pain sensation that one wants to cease that is painful, then it is on this view false that *the sensation* is painful because one desires that it cease. The new desire view is not therefore committed to the implausible claim that desiring that some sensation cease *makes* that sensation painful. Does this mean that the new desire view makes desire redundant, because it is committed to answering (ii) instead? Not at all. For since it is the experience of having a pain sensation that one wants to cease that is painful, then on this view it is also false that one desires that the sensation cease because *it* is painful. The new desire view is not therefore committed to the claim that painfulness is an *intrinsic* property of pain



sensations themselves, and hence independent of desire. If we move beyond a traditional understanding of the desire view, we see that Euthyphro-type questions are no longer problematic.

This might allow our new desire view to deal with the letter of the Euthyphro Dilemma, at least in this formulation. (I'll consider a revised version of the Dilemma in the final section.) But what of its spirit? What, that is, of the objection at the heart of the dilemma, that painfulness has normative implications – namely, that it necessarily provides the subject with a reason to act – and the desire view cannot capture this? The traditional reading of the desire view, if we recall, struggled to explain capture this, because it wasn't at all clear why desiring that a pain sensation cease necessarily gave us good reason to act so that it ceased. For mere desires, to repeat, lack the kind of normative force or authority to generate good reasons to act. However, on my account painfulness is a property of the relation between a pain sensation and a desire that it cease; what is painful is the experience of having a pain sensation that one wants to stop. And if we accept this account then we are in a much better position to capture the platitude about the normativity of painfulness. This is because we *do* always have good reason to act so that we are no longer in the relational state in question. The move to a wide-scope reading of the relationship between painfulness, pain sensations, and desire thus enables the desire view to capture the normativity that painfulness has.

To see this, suppose that I am in the following state: I have a pain sensation that I want to cease. Note that there are two ways in which I might rid myself of this state. I can either (i) act so that the pain sensation ceases, or (ii) act so that I rid myself of the desire. If I do *either* of these things, then I will no longer

be in a painful experiential state. But it seems to me that, given the nature of the desire in question, I do indeed always have good or justificatory reason to do either (i) or (ii). For note that there are two ways of viewing the relevant desire that the sensation cease. Either (a) the desire is faulty or non-ideal from the normative standpoint, insofar as it is one that I wouldn't have if I were better informed or more idealized; or (b) the desire is one that I would have in idealized conditions. If this is the case, then I *always* have good reason to do what I can to get myself out of the relational state in question. For if (a) is true and the desire is faulty or non-ideal, then I have reason to get rid of it; for I always have, plausibly, good reason to rid myself of faulty or non-ideal desires. But if (b) is true and the desire *isn't* faulty, then I have good reason to get rid of the sensation, since this is a sensation that my fully rational or idealized self would want me to get rid of. And a desire that our fully rational or idealized self would have is one, we might think, that has the requisite normative or justificatory power.<sup>22</sup>

If this is correct, then the new desire view of painfulness – which maintains that painfulness is a property of the relation between a pain sensation and a desire that the sensation cease – can explain what the desire theory as traditionally understood cannot, namely why painfulness necessarily gives us good or justificatory *pro tanto* reason to act so that the painful experience cease. Moreover, the new desire view can explain this without having to accept Sobel's implausible view that desires about our current phenomenological states cannot be mistaken. If so, then the new desire view manages to avoid both the letter and the spirit of the Euthyphro Dilemma.

There is a final move that the critic of the desire view might make: they might hold that the new desire view succumbs to a new version of the Euthyphro Dilemma. That is, even if the new desire view avoids giving the wrong answer to Euthyphro-type questions as originally formulated, it is committed to giving the wrong answer to a set of Euthyphro-type questions when these are modified to refer to painful *experiences* rather than pain sensations. For all that I've said above, therefore, the new desire view is still committed to an implausible explanation of the painfulness of pain. For suppose we ask, of some normal subject Paige and some painful experience E, whether (i) E is painful because Paige desires that E ceases, or whether (ii) Paige desires that E ceases because E is painful. Here again (ii) is considerably more natural and plausible than (i), in which case the new desire view is once again committed to an implausible explanation of painfulness.

However, this will only prove problematic if the new desire view *is* indeed committed to answering (i) rather than (ii). But now that we have seen the shape that the new desire view should take, it should be obvious that the new desire view is in fact committed to answering (ii) when faced with the relevant questions, and hence the new desire view *gets the right answer* to revised Euthyphro-type questions. To see this, recall that the new desire view maintains that what makes painful *experiences* painful is that they are constituted by a subject's desire that a pain *sensation* cease. It is expressly *not* the case, according to the new desire view, that what makes painful experiences painful is an *additional* element, namely a desire that this experience cease. So answer (i) is

straightforwardly incompatible with the new desire view. Moreover, the new desire view can happily accommodate the idea that a normal subject desires that a painful experience cease *because* the experience is painful, since it is open for her to claim that in addition to desiring that pain sensations cease, normal subjects *also* typically desire that painful experiences cease. As Derek Parfit puts the point, “[w]hen we are having some sensation that we intensely like or dislike, most of us also strongly want to be, or not to be, in this conscious state. Such desires about such conscious states we can call *meta-hedonic*.”<sup>23</sup> As a result, the new desire view will maintain that painful experiences are *constituted by* a desire that a pain sensation cease, and typically *generate* a meta-desire that the painful experience ceases. If so, then the new desire view will agree that in our example, Paige desires that E ceases *because* E is painful, and so captures the most natural and plausible answer to the new Euthyphro-type questions. The new version of the Euthyphro Dilemma turns out to be no dilemma at all for the new desire view.

None of this means, of course, that the new desire view of painfulness is ultimately vindicated. Perhaps some form of internalist account, such as a felt-quality view, or a rival externalist account, such as imperativism or evaluativism, has theoretical virtues that the new desire view lacks. There are, after all, other serious objections than can be levelled against the desire view, whether old or new. Still, if what I say here is correct, the new desire view about painfulness can answer one of the central arguments to be levelled against the approach by supporters of these rival theories. As a result, I hope to have left the desire view in better philosophical shape than I found it.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent overview of different theories of painfulness, see Aydede (2014). The term ‘internalist’ is meant to indicate that painfulness is somehow intrinsic to the sensory quality of pain; the term ‘externalist’, by contrast, maintains that painfulness is not intrinsic to pain sensations, but is due to some additional element or factor.

<sup>2</sup> This is part of the worry behind the ‘messenger-shooting objection’ to evaluativism, originally presented in Hall (1989). When it comes to imperativism, there is a different worry, namely that of explaining why commands *necessarily* motivate one to act accordingly. For sophisticated defences of evaluativism and imperativism, see, respectively, Bain (2013) and Klein (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the argument here will not by itself convince phenomenal theorists or evaluativists or imperativists to reject their particular view and adopt the new

desire view. Nevertheless, my arguments here will hopefully have some impact on these other views, at least to the extent that their proponents tend to reject *all* desire views on the basis of Euthyphro-type arguments. If I'm right, such a rejection is too quick, and so the motivation to adopt rival views – in particular, rival externalist views – is somewhat undermined.

<sup>4</sup> Bain (2013, p. 71).

<sup>5</sup> O'Sullivan & Schroer (2012, p. 740).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See Klein (2007).

<sup>8</sup> See Grahek (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Alston (1967); Armstrong (1968); Brandt (1979); Hall (1989); Heathwood (2007); Korsgaard (1996); Parfit (2011); Pitcher (1970); Tye (1995).

<sup>10</sup> Heathwood (2007, p. 41).

<sup>11</sup> Here I assume, without argument, that pain sensations have some phenomenological element in common that identifies them *as* pain sensations, and distinguishes them from other forms of unpleasantness, such as sensations of cold, hunger, nausea, and the like.

<sup>12</sup> For ease of exposition, I've reverted to talking of desires that pain sensations cease, rather than desires that they not be occurring. But strictly speaking, the desires in question are desires that pain sensations not be occurring. Nothing of substance in the arguments that follow depends upon this, I think.

<sup>13</sup> Hall (1989, p. 648).

<sup>14</sup> Bain (2013) seems to understand the the Euthyphro Dilemma in this way, and both Bain (2013) and Parfit (2011) cast doubt upon the capacity of desire to capture the normative status of painfulness.

<sup>15</sup> The claim that painfulness necessarily gives us *pro tanto* reason is in fact questionable; Cutter and Tye (2014), for instance, think it false. However, I'll assume that that weight of opinion is against Cutter and Tye on this point, and that the claim is *more* plausible than either the claim that painfulness only provides us with *prima facie* reason to act, or the claim that it provides us with no good reason to act at all. Hereafter I'll take the qualification 'pro tanto' as understood.

<sup>16</sup> For a helpful discussion of these kinds of failings, see Smith (1994).

<sup>17</sup> For a clear and persuasive explanation of this version of subjectivism, see chapter 5 of Smith (1994).

<sup>18</sup> Sobel, D. (2011, p. 59).

<sup>19</sup> I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pushing me to be clearer about this point.

<sup>20</sup> There is a considerable literature on this issue. Those who defend a wide-scope reading of the instrumental principle include John Broome, Jonathan Dancy, Stephen Darwall, R. Jay Wallace, and Jonathan Way. See, for instance, Broome (1999), Dancy (2000), Darwall (1983), Wallace (2001), and Way (2010). A prominent dissenting voice is Kolodny (2005).

<sup>21</sup> Although the vast majority of desire theorists accept the desire view as traditionally understood, this view of painfulness – in the sense of what is bad about pain – as a relational property has its supporters. Thus Kahane (2009, p.

332) expresses a similar view. Kahane describes *objectivism* as holding that “the state that is intrinsically bad is not that of having a sensation of pain, but that of suffering – of having this sensation and disliking it.” Similarly, Parfit (2011, p. 54) endorses a relational account, albeit expressed in terms of dislike rather than desire: he claims that “When we are in pain, what is bad is not our sensation but our conscious state of having a sensation that we dislike. If we didn’t dislike the sensation, our conscious state would not be bad.”

<sup>22</sup> Is it true that we always have good reason to rid ourselves of desires that we would not have in idealized circumstances? We might be tempted to answer no to this question if we focus on desires that aren’t doing any harm: they are not ideal, but nor are they interfering with aspects of our epistemic and practical functioning. (They don’t disrupt our thinking or acting, let’s say.) But this temptation should be resisted. There is always *something* to be said for getting rid of mental items that are non-ideal, at least other things being equal. In support, think of my having an unimportant but false belief. Even if this isn’t causing any particular problems in my epistemic economy, it remains true that I have pro tanto reason to rid myself of this belief to the extent that I can, simply on the grounds that it is false. By the same token, suppose I have some trivial desire for something that isn’t good. Even if this isn’t causing any particular problems in my practical economy, it remains true that I have pro tanto reason to rid myself of this desire to the extent that I can, simply on the grounds that it fails to be an appropriate response to value. To think otherwise is to think that we are under *no* normative pressure to make ourselves better off in terms of our beliefs and desires when these go astray; and that strikes me as false. Of course,



it is important to stress the pro tanto nature of these reasons. In many cases it won't be worth the effort to get rid of such beliefs and desires, and so we don't have *all-things-considered* reason to always do so. But this doesn't undermine the claim that we always have pro tanto reason; and that is all I need to show in order for the desire view to capture the normativity that painfulness is meant to have, since this is also cashed out in terms of pro tanto reasons.

<sup>23</sup> Parfit (2011, p. 54).

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